The Christian News-Letter

Edited by
J. H. OLDHAM

No. 52 OCTOBER 23rd, 1940

DEAR MEMBER,

There have been a lot of letters about the Supplement to C.N.-L. No. 47 on "Youth, the War and the Future." Some are enthusiastic about it, others highly critical. The treatment had to be so concise that I am not surprised that some of you did not realise that an attempt was made in a single brief paper to deal with two quite different questions. It first gave an outline of the *educational* features of the County Badge plan and then went on to discuss the quite separate *political* question how a desirable educational reform could be brought about in war-time.

The correspondence is a fresh reminder how difficult real communication is between different minds, especially through print. I try to choose my words in the News-Letter with care, and I wrote: "*There could be no greater blunder* than to confuse the County Badge Movement with a campaign for physical fitness in itself." What followed was an attempt to explain this assertion. Yet I am told that the mental attitude of the movement is a "glorying in the physical, first and foremost," and that its aim is to create the Nazi blonde beast and to develop hiking and heartiness.

There is no answer to these charges on paper. It is perfectly true that the movement *can* be developed in the direction which some of you fear. But it is no less true that those who are promoting the movement intend the precise opposite. Their purpose is to train the body to be the willing and effective instrument of the spirit. Argument gets us nowhere. You either see as a great and illuminating discovery new possibilities of making the body a more serviceable organ of spiritual purpose; or you do not see it. What is described in the Supplement is not physical training in isolation for its own sake, but physical training consciously directed in the light of a carefully thought out plan towards the education of the total personality. The perception of the intimate relation between the spiritual and the physical is in my view a true Christian insight.

When we turn to the political question how a desirable educational reform (worked out long before the war and shaped by purely educational and spiritual aims) can be brought into operation on a national scale during war-time, we enter a sphere in which motives are inevitably more mixed than in education at its best. What is alien to education may be an irremovable factor in politics. It is a simple fact that reforms in the political sphere have never been brought about by idealistic and altruistic impulses alone. Political reforms become possible only when moral forces are to some extent reinforced by material and selfish interests. That is because power and material interest belong to the warp and woof of politics; if it was otherwise, the political sphere would have been transformed into the Kingdom of God. I expect that some of you will jib at these statements. But the price of refusing to take account of the realities of politics is to remain impotent in the political field. A statesman who wants to carry a public measure has to appeal, consciously or unconsciously, to a variety of motives. As a Christian he may be actuated by the noblest spiritual purpose; as a Christian statesman, he has to consider what forces in a very mixed society can be rallied to the support of the proposal he wishes to carry.

The nation is at the present time engaged in a struggle for its existence. It has no time for matters unconnected with the war. This fact must govern any approach to education in war-time. Health, alertness, endurance, acuteness of observation, initiative, resource, readiness to take responsibility, loyalty and comradeship are qualities that a human being needs to meet the demands of life. What would I not give to have them all? Their character and value are not altered, nor is education made militaristic, by the fact that those who possess these qualities are, among other things, good soldiers, sailors and airmen. What might be, however, is that a nation that has been apathetic about education would, in an hour of crisis, catch a fleeting vision of its possibilities. The lover of youth will seize the occasion. It is probably too good to come true, but it would be a splendid instance of the irony of things if the nation, looking back, were to find that it owed a signal educational advance, bringing spiritual benefits to its neglected youth, to the driving power of the War Office.

THE COUNTY BADGE PLAN

The following points brought out in letters are worth mentioning.

The significance of the *regional* idea in relation to the whole plan is emphasised in the following quotation: " The Supplement suggests that we should take advantage of military necessity to insist on greater care for the bodily and mental health of the whole mass in education. We should also take advantage of the disruption of communications to encourage local organisation, local initiative and regional patriotism. Some of the counties may be too small to be an effective nucleus under modern conditions, but why not, instead of having Commissioners for Scotland, Wales and North and South England, minimise control from the centre and encourage e.g. East Anglia, Northumbria, North and South Wales to combine under their own Commissioners. In that way you would help to avoid the danger of chauvinism into which ' youth movement patriotism ' has led the continental countries and encourage real responsibility to a recognisable neighbourhood and work against standardisation."

Another correspondent urges, quite rightly, that the Supplement did not sufficiently bring out the importance of ensuring that the tests provide for *real* responsibility. It is a vital matter to give adolescents the sense that they have a real vocation in society. Failure to emphasise this sufficiently was accidental; it belongs to the essence of the plan.

In illustration I may refer to papers that have been sent to me about the youth " Service Squads " which the Hertfordshire Education Department is promoting, following the example of East Suffolk. The aim is to form one in each parish. Membership may be confined to one sex or may include both boys and girls. Members of the Service Squads will be encouraged to qualify for the County Badge. Squads must undertake some form of national service. Among those suggested are messenger service, the collection and sorting of salvage, training for first-aid, help at first-aid posts, food production, organising out-of-school activities for evacuated children, auxiliary fire squads, mending, darning and knitting for troops, gathering reserves of wood, harvest work for farmers, helping Women's Institutes in fruit bottling and grading, helping housewives who are doing war work and aiding elderly and invalid neighbours in putting up an air-raid shelter or in similar needs.

Another member points out that if the County Badge is to have the desired effect of creating the sense of belonging to a community, those who acquire it must in some way be members of a community or group engaging regularly in common activity. Without this actual experience of community the mere possession of the Badge will achieve little.

A number of correspondents rightly insist that the fundamental problem is the provision of leaders. I indicated in the Supplement that Gordonstoun School is willing to assist in the training of leaders, and no doubt the help of other schools throughout the country could also be enlisted. It is obvious that our present resources in leadership are altogether inadequate to meet the need, and that it is essential to any advance that the experience and trained personnel of the voluntary youth organisations should be drawn on to the fullest extent.

Without what these organisations have accomplished no new move would be possible.

But the time has come when the nation owes it to its youth to accept full national responsibility for their welfare. The further step must be taken of integrating the activities of the voluntary organisations in a boldly conceived national programme of education, which will take full account of non-scholastic types of education, and of reinforcing these activities with substantial aid from public funds. In any such national plan the needs of girls must be given equal consideration with those of boys.

THE RELIGION AND LIFE WEEK IN BRISTOL

An interesting and promising experiment has been carried out this month by the Commission on International Friendship and Social Responsibility, which works in close conjunction with the Council on the Christian Faith and the Common Life (under whose auspices the Christian News-Letter is published) and also has its permanent headquarters at 20 Balcombe Street. Following on months of careful preparation, a series of meetings, in which the different Churches co-operated, was held at Bristol over a period of ten days. The programme dealt with the relation of the Christian faith to the various activities of the national life.

The whole programme was carried through without interruption in spite of war conditions and demonstrated that large-scale efforts of evangelism are feasible in war-time. It showed also that a combined effort on the part of the Churches offers an exceptional opportunity of reaching and penetrating the life of a large city. It was the judgment of those responsible for the experiment that it had justified itself and should be repeated in other centres. The strongest impression left in the minds of some who took part was the evangelistic fervour which characterised the addresses, and the repeated emphasis on the way in which the revelation of God in Christ challenges men to a fundamental decision.

The Churches of Bristol are to be congratulated on the courage and faith which with they undertook and carried through the enterprise amid the many difficulties of war-time.

THE LINK OF PRAYER

I made the suggestion four weeks ago that members of the News-Letter should associate themselves in a daily act of faith in God as Light and Love. The former Master of Selwyn College, Cambridge, writes about this suggestion: " May I send just one line to say how grateful I am for your effort to bind the members of the body of your readers by a link of common prayer? And may I add a note on the help it would be to those who accept your invitation, if they would *train themselves* in the use of the Lord's Prayer with this special intention? " The words which Christ taught His disciples are a form of prayer which through all the ages and in every nation is felt to express the deepest needs and highest aspirations of men and links us to our fellow-Christians throughout the world. It both draws us closer to one another and unites us at the same time with the inmost mind and purpose of Christ.

THE RE-INTEGRATION OF PERSONALITY

I have a letter signed jointly by several of our members about a project which has been much in their minds and which may be of interest to others. They have been studying the whole set of News-Letters and find that through almost every letter there runs, like a silver thread, the thought of how we may become the kind of people whom God can use as leaven to recreate society. What they would like to do as a means to this end is to provide a quiet home in the country, or even a few simple huts, where those who have lost spiritual tone and margin through the wear and tear of work may come for rest, refreshment and re-invigoration. They say that they could have got the signatures to the letter of a hundred young people who feel the need of such help through an opportunity of directed study, further training and fellowship. They are certain that the centre would be widely used and that they can secure as principal one who is peculiarly gifted for this kind of service. I know whom they have in mind and concur whole-heartedly in their judgment. All that is lacking is funds and equipment. If any of you are able to help, or are interested in the project, please get into touch with Miss Holmes, 327 Victoria Road, Ruislip, Middlesex.

THE CHRISTIAN NEWS-LETTER

With this number the Christian News-Letter completes its first year. We have never had much margin or reserves, and sometimes the getting out of a News-Letter has been a rather near thing. But, in spite of all, fifty-two News-Letters have seen the light on the appointed date, and we look back on the past year with much thankfulness.

We have been kept going by the encouragement of our members. The latest instance was at Bristol. We decided to invite the members of the C.N.-L. in that city to meet with us during the Religion and Life Week which has been already mentioned. Though only a few days' notice of the meeting was given there must have been at least 150 present. The tone of the meeting was as cheering as the attendance.

In the last six weeks we have had to evacuate in succession two sets of offices. (Our permanent offices have recently suffered further damage.) The move to Oxford was made possible by the generosity of our friends there, whose hospitality and indefatigable assistance have carried us round a difficult corner. It also owed much to the help in many practical ways of Lord Hambleden, who from the first has taken the keenest interest in the News-Letter. Our staff tackled the problems of the transfer with the grit and resource with which the country as a whole is responding to the present emergency.

Miss Iredale was recalled to London from her first visit to Oxford to make the necessary arrangements by a telephone message that a high-explosive bomb had severely damaged the house in which she has lived for nearly twenty years. She had to carry through the salvaging of her home simultaneously with the evacuation of our offices.

All this has happened at the moment when the first annual subscriptions terminate. We are most grateful to the large number of our members who have responded immediately to the suggestion of renewing their subscriptions without waiting for a reminder. It will lessen the burden on our staff in reorganising the production of the News-Letter at a new centre if as many as possible will follow this example, and save us the necessity of sending out one or more reminders.

The beginning of a second year is an occasion for reviewing our task and making plans based on what we have learned during the past twelve months. I have tried to clear my own mind and to provide what may be of help to others in a paper (which would take two supplements) on what is involved in the demand for " a more definite Christian lead." I may publish the first part next week and the second a fortnight later. But the drafts are at present in the hands of a dozen able critics, and if the criticism is drastic I may have to hold the paper over for a week or two to put it into better shape.

Our temporary address until further notice is Arlosh Hall, Mansfield Road, Oxford.

Yours sincerely,

J. H. Oldham

Subscriptions.—The rate of subscriptions to the News-Letter is 12s. 6d. ($3.0 in U.S.A and Canada) for one year, and 6s. 6d. ($1.50 in U.S.A. and Canada) for six months, and 3s. 6d. for three months.

All communications and subscriptions should be sent to—

THE CHRISTIAN NEWS-LETTER, ARLOSH HALL, MANSFIELD ROAD, OXFORD.

Published by Dr. J. H. Oldham for the Council on the Christian Faith and the Common Life and printed by the Kemp Hall Press, Ltd., in the City of Oxford.